

A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



By the time you read this issue of SPAN, Americans will have at last begun the complex and extended process to select the next President of the United States.

President George W. Bush is constitutionally ineligible to seek reelection and Vice President Dick Cheney has declined to run for President—so for the first time in 80 years, neither the incumbent President nor vice president is seeking election. As a result, there are several candidates in both political parties seeking the presidential nomination. The process for selecting President Bush's successor, already underway for most candidates for over a year, now moves into high gear—and the consequence of the coming political party caucuses and primary elections will be a narrowing of the field of candidates. In fact, due to the early scheduling of these preliminary state-by-state selections in 2008, the candidates effectively chosen to represent the major parties will likely be known in February.

Americans will then participate in a long campaign season that will continue through the national party nominating conventions (the Democrats will meet in Denver, Colorado from August 25-28, the Republicans will meet in Minneapolis-St. Paul, in Minnesota, from September 1-4) and then on to the November 4 general elections. After the formalities of the Electoral College are complete, the next President of the United States will be sworn in on January 20, 2009.

It's a much longer process than an Indian national election—or for that matter for any other nation's election process. Indians often remark to Americans about the long and complex selection process for American political party leadership that takes place before, rather than after, the election as in India. However, we share in common a com-



mitment to political party and leadership selection decisions that are made democratically, in free and fair processes based on universal franchise.

Americans are accustomed to engaging in political discussions easily and are usually glad to offer our interpretations of America's political process. Throughout this election year, SPAN will feature articles with unique insights and interpretations of the U.S. election process. In this issue, "A Fresh Start" by Michelle Austein explains why this is an unusual election and what many Americans are thinking about as they observe the candidates and vote in the primaries. We're also offering short articles explaining the primary election process and checking in with a very enthusiastic new American citizen, Malavika Jagannathan, originally from Bangalore, who will be voting in her first U.S. presidential election.

Because understanding our world requires recognition of the timeless as well as current affairs, we are including in this issue an article by Angus McDonald about his travels around South and Central Asia to take photographs of selected historic conservation projects that have been undertaken in recent years by the United States, with local partners. The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation tangibly demonstrates America's enduring commitment to preserve and protect mankind's heritage and underscores for this region's young people the region's deep common traditions.

Wishing you a happy new year!